DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 061 CG 024 077

AUTHOR Emihovich, Catherine; Blake, Brenedette Hardy
TITLE Evaluators as Moral Agents: Risks and Responsibilities in a New Role.
PUB DATE 21 Apr 92
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (73rd, San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Evaluation Problems; *Evaluators; *Moral Values; Pregnancy; Prevention; Program Evaluation

ABSTRACT

Taking the position that science is not value-free has certain consequences. There are both risks and rewards inherent when evaluators relinquish an objective, non-involved role for a more subjective, partisan role in an evaluation where issues of class, gender, and race are intertwined. It is important for evaluators to consider how their personal and political commitments to specific social programs affect their judgments of those programs, and how the interests of social justice can be served in promoting the interests of the clients for whom these programs are intended. The evaluators' values helped to frame the evaluation of a teenage pregnancy prevention program in a rural southern community in the Florida panhandle. The evaluation approach was based on feminist concepts of how social research in general should be conducted and on the principles of action research. A high premium placed on interviewing program participants reflects a desire to serve the interests of social justice by giving a voice to people whom the decision makers rarely hear, and whose interests are rarely considered when decisions to terminate programs are made. Evaluators may face moral dilemmas in the future if the use of incentive programs with at-risk populations increases. Evaluators need to identify the moral and political stance they will assume in conducting evaluations in the future (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED343061

Evaluators as moral agents: Risks and responsibilities in a new role

Catherine Emihovich
Brenedette Hardy Blake

Florida State University

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Asociation, San Francisco, April 21, 1992. This research reported in this paper is based on an evaluation study supported by a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Tallahassee, FL.

CG024077

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Catherine Emihovich

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Evaluation has traditionally been conceived of as an activity that involves the dispassionate judgment of an external reviewer who provides an assessment of the program's merit and worth. The underlying assumption of this position has been that human affairs can be subjected to the same standards of scientific rationality that characterizes practices in the natural sciences. Evaluators who violated this assumption by acknowledging their own values in relation to the program being evaluated ran the risk of being perceived as too subjectively involved to render an impartial judgment. Values were seen as messy and confusing to the overall purpose of the evaluation, which was to determine (objectively, of course) the self evident "facts" of how the program operated, independent of the context in which it was applied. And as for any moral judgments about whether the program served the interests of social justice, or whether benefits were equally distributed, or whether program funds could better be applied elsewhere, these were issues no evaluator wished to acknowledge, except on those rare occasions when conversations were "off the record," and people were willing to admit their deep seated concerns.

In this paper, my co-author and I take a very explicit stance toward declaring our values and describing how they frame the evaluation of a teen pregnancy prevention program. We share Guba and Lincoln's (1989) assertion that science is not value free, nor are evaluations in a fourth generation model. But such a position brings its own consequences. The purpose of this paper is to examine the risks and rewards inherent when evaluators relinquish an objective, non-involved role for a more subjective, partisan role in an evaluation where issues of class, gender, and race are intertwined. Specifically, my co-author and I are concerned with questions of how our personal and political commitments

to specific social programs affect our judgments of them, and how the interests of social justice can be served in promoting the interests of the clients for whom these programs are intended.

Theoretical Perspectives

Our position was developed from a number of theoretical perspectives. In a recent paper, Schwandt (1989) noted that evaluators should "recapture a moral discourse," a point of view shared by Ericson (1990), who suggested that evaluators have a moral obligation to consider the normative content of evaluation practice. These ideas are in line with the recent work of other theorists who have suggested that evaluation practices should reflect changes in philosophical orientations from a rationalist, utilitarian approach to a more humanistic, value laden approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1986). A similar point of view has been espoused by Noddings (1984) and Soltis (1989) who argue that ethical considerations should frame the choice of educational and social research problems. Elsewhere, I have argued that social researchers have a responsibility to the larger public that cannot be evaded by simply appealing to abstract goals such as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Emihovich, 1990). Those who conduct research within an evaluative context are obligated to consider the moral implications that their findings may carry for those who are affected by the program in question. Several minority researchers have gone even further by suggesting that social science researchers should assume part of the responsibility for enhancing the quality of people's lives through their

work, a position that completely belies the concept of the disinterested scientist or evaluator. Our thinking was also influenced by feminist research, in that:

> Knowledge and politics are process rather than achievement, and that the commitment to engage in conversation to find out what the world is like is a moral and political commitment to a community...Through our decisions with a community, we decide how we want to belong to the world, how we want to set about understanding it, living in it, and changing it (Seller, 1988, p. 180-181).

Program Description

The world we have been examining for the past ten months is located in a rural southern community in the Florida panhandle. The predominately minority county has the worst infant mortality rate in the state, and one of the highest teen pregnancy rates. The program we have been evaluating is operated by a community organization, and funded by a non-profit state agency. This community organization operates several programs to assist the youth of the community. One program in particular, called Brighter Futures, is for girls ages 14-17 who have already had one child, and who are enrolled with the intent of preventing a second pregnancy. The purpose of "Brighter Futures" is to develop peer support groups for these girls, based on a similar program known as the "Dollar-A-Day Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Program," which was developed by Dolgan and Goodman (1989). These support groups are created through the use of incentives in the form of weekly stipends ($7, plus $5 transportation for those girls who need to pay for rides), which are paid at the end of each meeting. A basic assumption is that while the girls may have

been motivated initially to join based on these stipends, additional incentives should arise from the peer support and counseling the girls receive from each other. The girls attend weekly meetings and plan social activities with the help of a trained counselor. A significant fact about this program is that both the community agency and its programs are controlled by African-American women. All of the participants enrolled in this program are also African-American women.

The available literature on teen pregnancies suggests that successful prevention depends upon three factors: (1) adequate information about sexuality, reproduction, and family planning methods; (2) access to family planning services which are cost effective and easily obtained; and, (3) the teen mother's motivation to succeed, remain in school, and plan for a career (Moore, Simms, & Betsey, 1986). While the concept of "Brighter Futures" encompasses all three aspects, the primary focus is on developing the girls' self esteem and raising their aspirations for the future. According to Schorr & Schorr (1988), "The most fundamental reason for high rates of school-age pregnancy in the United States is that far too many youngsters reach adolescence without hopes or plans for a future that seem compelling enough to deter them from early parenthood" (p. 41). While an extensive literature on teen pregnancy is available, relatively few studies have examined the factors affecting the teen mothers' motivation and desire to change her life patterns. In addition, there have been no prior evaluation studies of incentive programs similar to this one. A substantive review of model programs for teenage pregnancy prevention does not mention

any incentive programs (Brindis & Jeremy, 1988). This evaluation was intended not only to provide feedback to program developers in terms of successful program implementation and achievement of program goals, it was also intended to contribute to the teen pregnancy literature in terms of identifying successful ways in which teen mothers can be motivated to change their behavior.

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation approach was based on feminist concepts of how social research in general should be conducted, following the work of Stacy (1988) and Seller (1988), and on the principles of action research. The agency director was very concerned that case studies be done to reflect the reality of the girls' lives, and to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics which lead to teenage pregnancy. In addition to compiling case studies, an ethnographic approach is being followed, with participant observations of the weekly meetings, interviews with all program staff, and the collection of all program documents. Notes from observations of related sites (e.g., executive board meetings, community gatherings, etc.) are also being kept. Data from the girls' school and health records are also available. The program is funded until December, 1993.

Because of the sensitive nature of the date being collected, the evaluation is very much oriented to the responsive, or stakeholder approach (Bryk, 1983). As Stecher and Davis (1987) defined it:

> Responsive evaluation is guided by the belief that the only meaningful evaluation is one that seeks to understand an issue from the multiple points of view of all people who have a stake in the program. The responsive evaluator does not believe that there is a single answer to a program question that can be found using tests, questionnaires, or statistical analyses. Instead, each person who is influenced by a program perceives it in a unique manner, and an evaluator can help try to answer program-related questions by portraying reality through the eyes of concerned constituents. The goal of a responsive evaluator is to facilitate efforts to understand a program from multiple perspectives (pp. 36-37).

While this approach did not preclude the use of quantitative data (e.g., attendance rates at program meetings), a high premium was placed on interviewing these young women to learn how the program has made a difference in their lives, and in what ways it needed to be changed in order to help them. In effect, one purpose of this evaluation was to serve the interests of social justice by giving voice to people who the decision makers rarely hear, and whose interests are rarely considered when decisions to terminate programs are made (Sirotnik, 1990).

In providing a means for these young women to voice their own concerns, a key component is the relationship of the evaluator to the people being evaluated. The relationships that we developed in the context of this work were of paramount concern, and led us to one of our questions: to what extent do differences by class (both evaluators are university trained) and race (the first author is Caucasian, the second is African-American) affect our relationships with the participants? Are there co-occurring identities we all share (e.g., problems with being a mother) that can successfully bridge these perceived

differences? Recent literature on teen parents indicates that trust in terms of their willingness to share intimate, personal details of their lives is not built overnight, but instead over a period of several months, or even years (Dash, 1990). In our case, the feeling is that even after almost a year in this site, we are still relatively estranged from the girls, and that both class and racial differences are still problematic.

Issues for discussion

Given the length of time available in a presentation of this kind, it is impossible to provide the kind of rich data that led us to certain conclusions about the effectiveness of this program. Instead, we would like to share some of the concerns we have about doing this type of work, and how we are struggling to address them.

Feminism and Program Development

One issue concerns our feminist stance. As feminists, we are deeply committed to the type of services this program offers. We often ask ourselves to what extent do our commitments influence our ability to provide needed information to help improve the program? For example, we have already noted that this program is entirely controlled by African-American women. However, as outsiders, we see noticeable problems in the efectiveness of some of the counselors in working with the girls, a concern that is shared by the program director. Because women of color have rarely had the opportunity to manage their own programs, it is difficult to provide constructive feedback without appearing to overlay an agenda that is closer to our feminist concerns than it may be to this

organization's concerns. For example, we see the raising of the girls' self esteem as a critical issue of empowerment, of making them more conscious of their ability to take control of their own lives. To move the young women toward this goal, we feel there are specific activities that could occur within the group meetings. The question for us is how much do we promote this suggestion (through making programmatic recommendations) without becoming program developers? Right now the program director is seeking input for developing a curriculum guideline; how far should we go in sharing our ideas? Should we bring in literature or topics for discussion? The problem is complicated by the fact that these young women hold very negative impressions of feminism, a point already raised by bell hooks (1989). Yet we are disturbed by the idea that without knowledge of certain ideas that could lead them to reflect on their choices, these girls remain trapped in a cycle of poverty and despair.

Reciprocity

Another issue that concerns us is that of reciprocity. The question of reciprocity always arises in ethnographic research (or it should), yet the specifics of what is gained by the participants is rarely identified. For example, we would like to see an open discussion at AERA of the idea of sharing royalties from any publications with the people who contributed to it by sharing their lives, and a discussion of whether this practice should constitute one of the standards for qualitative research in general. But there is also the question of what counts as reciprocity, since the rewards for academicians are not

necessarily those desired by people outside our narrow community. I thought I had solved the reciprocity issue by telling the girls that we hoped to write a book, and that we would share the money received. The first question asked was, "How much will we get?" Not wanting to work under false pretenses, I said, "Probably not much. Academic books don't sell like Stephen King's books do." At that point, one girl asked me why I bothered to do it. It was clear from their attitude that they couldn't see the point, and I couldn't think of an intelligent way to explain the system of rewards (publish or perish) that I operated under. We are learning that reciprocity can occur in small ways; driving a girl to the store to get diapers (there's no public transporation and many girls live way out in the country) is a welcome act. Class differences are magnified in small acts of charity; we take for granted the ability to simply get in the car and go.

In their recent paper on standards for qualitative research, Howe and Eisenhart (1990) did not address the question of reciprocity. Even more troubling is that fact that we do not live in the community, nor do we share in the problems that exist in these girls lives. Stacy (1988) has already explored the question of whether there can be a feminist ethnography, and has argued that ethnographic research can put people at greater risk of exploitation, abandonment, and betrayal than positivistic research. These are strong words, bu the fact remains that the professional benefits of working in this community accrue to us, and it is not clear yet what advantages the girls gain by working with us. We are painfully aware of bell hook's comment that:

> Even if perceived "authorities" writing about a group to which they do not belong and/or over which they wield power, are progressive, caring, and "right-on" in every way, as long as their authority is constituted by either the absence of the voices of the individuals whose experiences they seek to address, or the dismissal of the voices as unimportant, the subject-object dichotomy is maintained and domination is enforced (1989, p. 43).

Incentives for Participation

One of the most critical issues concerns the fact that this program is incentive based, in that the participants are paid to attend and remain childless (or without a second child). These programs represent a growing movement of using incentives to promote desired social outcomes, the ethics of which have not yet been addressed. We have not yet thought through the implications of this practice, but we realize it as one freighted with moral consequences, especially since the line between individual choice and material needs can become very thin indeed, when one is dealing with a group as poor as this one is. Furthermore, in our state, the use of birth control implants is just beginning. What is the moral position of the evaluator in programs where these implants are advocated in subtly coercive ways? (We hasten to add this is not the case in this program, in fact it is quite the opposite. When Norplant was first made available through the local county public health unit, so many women requested it that the supply was exhausted in three days. However, I am aware of other programs in the state where the idea has been discussed to require women to use Norplant as a condition of receiving public benefits).

Another unanticipated consequence of the girls using Norplant is that their risk of contracting AIDS has substantially increased. Before, the girls primarily relied upon

condom use, a method they didn't prefer because the men often refused to wear one, and often didn't have one available at the appropriate time. Since Norplant reduces the risks of becoming pregnant to virtually zero, the girls have increased their sexual activity. Given the alarming spread of AIDS in this county, a problem accentuated by the recent closing of the school based health clinic, as evaluators we could spend all our time and energy just urging the counselors to provide AIDS information in the group meetings.

Political considerations

This evaluation holds political ramifications in the sense that the programs emphasize the concept of African-American self-help, and stress the need for individual responsibility and personal choices, yet there are also structural social problems that need to be addressed if these girls are to be successful in later life. Two problems worth mentioning are the lack of public transportation to the state capital, where the job opportunities are greater, and the tracking problem in the local school system, where many of these girls are shunted into vocational tracks or into an alternative high school, despite test scores which reveal their potential for higher education. We see part of our role as helping the program staff realize how a report detailing program success can be used politically to deny services in other critical areas. We must also muster energy to combat efforts by certain groups to use our reports to argue that all social problems in this community will be solved if these girls do not have a second child. The lack of appropriate child care services in this county is shameful, and with the current crisis in state funding,

all attention seems to be focused on reducing teen pregnancy, without considering what opportunities and services are available for those girls who already have one child and who choose not to become pregnant again.

Conclusion

As the paradigms for doing behavioral and social science research change, it is axiomatic that the researcher or evaluator's role will change as well. While this shift is just now being addressed in the field, our position is that many different accounts by evaluators who want to incorporate a more explicitly normative stance in their work need to be presented to keep the dialogue open, and to provide answers as to how these issues will be addressed. With respect to the evaluation literature, the voices of minority participants and program developers have been silent, a fact we hope to change by providing accounts of the girls' lives. We also hope to underscore the moral dilemmas evaluators may face in the future if the use of incentive programs with at-risk populations increases, and to suggest that evaluators need to identity the moral and political stance they will assume in conducting evaluations in the future.

References

Brindis, C.D., & Jeremy, R.J. (1988). Adolescent pregnancy and parenting in California. San Francisco: Center for Population and Reproductive Health Policy, Institute for Policy Studies, University of California, San Francisco.

Bryk, A.S. (1983). (Ed.). Stakeholder based evaluation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dash, L. (1990). When children want children. New York: Random House.

Dolgan, J.I., & Goodman, S.A. (1989). Dollar-a-Day teenage pregnancy prevention program. Aurora, CO: Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains.

Emihovich, C. (1990). Reopening the conversation: The ethic of caring in educational research. In M.J.M. Brown (Ed.), Proceedings of the fifth annual Qualitative Research in Education conference, Athens, GA: University of Georgia.

Ericson, D. (1990). Social justice, evaluation, and the educational system. In K.A. Sirotnik (Ed.), Evaluation and social justice: Issues in public education (pp. 5-22). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). Fourth generation evaluation. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

hooks, b. (1989). Talking back: Thinking feminism, thinking black. Boston: South End Press.

Howe, K., & Eisenhart, M. (1990). Standards for qualitative (and quantitative) research: A prolegomenon. Educational Researcher, 19(4), 2-9.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Moore, K.A., Simms, L.L., & Betsey, C.L. (1986). Choice and circumstance. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Noddings, N. (1984). Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Schorr, E.B., & Schorr, D. (1988). Within our reach. New York: Anchor Books.

Schwandt, T.A. (1989). Recapturing moral discourse in evaluation. Educational Researcher, 18(8), 11-16.

Seller, A. (1988). Realism vs. relativism: Toward a politically active epistemology. In M. Griffiths & M. Whitford (Eds.), Feminist perspectives in philosophy (pp. 169-186). Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press.

Sirotnik, K. (1990). (Ed.). Evaluation and social justice: Issues in public education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Soltis, J. S. (1989). The ethics of qualitative research. Qualitative Studies in Education, 2(2), 123-130.

Stacy, J. (1988). Can there be a feminist ethnography? Women's Studies International Forum, 11(1), 21-27.

Stake, R.E. (1986). An evolutionary view of program improvement. In E.R. House (Ed.), New directions in educational evaluation (pp. 89-102). Philadelphia: Falmer.

Stecher, B.M., & Davis, W.A. (1987). How to focus an evaluation. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.